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ABSTRACT

The need for training in basic skills in the workplace in Britain has been produced by demographic changes, new technology, changes introduced in firms, the European Single Market due in 1992, and the required competitive bidding for some contracts. Workbase, a nonprofit organization, offers training and support for training organizations, Local Employer Networks, and Training and Enterprise Councils. It has government and trade union support. Training needs analyses are conducted for employers, and recommendations for training are based on the findings. Staff released time is the greatest problem area. Course outcomes are usually of benefit both to students and to the company as a whole. Line managers and supervisors must be completely aware of the benefits and implications of work-based training for their staff. Workbase Materials Packs can be used as the basis of the courses offered, but courses are custom-designed for each client. (Case studies of programs developed at a heating company, a social services department in an inner city, and an airport are included.) (CML)

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Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

BASIC SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE

Work related basic skills provision is a relatively new area of work for many practitioners, but one which needs considerable expansion. Workbase has been working in the field for over 10 years and has recently been given Special Development Funding by ALBSU to support practitioners. A Training Document will be published in August and a training programme will be available during 1990/1991.

Rose Taw, an Education and Training Consultant with Workbase, examines the issues which are increasing the need for basic skills provision. Case Studies are included to illustrate Workbase Methodology and two particular issues are discussed in depth: Course outcomes and the need to involve line management.

Workbase is an independent, non-profit making organisation with charitable status. It promotes training for manual employees and ancillary staff and provides direct training in all aspects of communication skills working nationally in both the public and private sectors. Workbase receives fee income from employers and grant aid for new initiatives and co-ordination from the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), London Boroughs Grants Committee and an Urban Aid Grant through the London Borough of Camden.

Workbase offers training and support for training organisations, Local Employer Networks (LENS) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). It works together with educationalists to provide opportunities for education and training to those who have received least in the past.

Workbase has the full support of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Local Government Training Board (LGTB), and the National Health Service Training Authority (NHSTA). Workbase also works with the full support of the Trade Unions and has been approved by the Trade Union Congress Education and Training Committee.

In Britain the workforce is ageing and requiring new skills. Suddenly it is required to be more competent, confident, numerate, literate, technologically-minded and flexible than ever before. What are the issues involved? How can practitioners promote basic skills training at a time when training is in demand but funding is being cut?

Demographic Change

Country-wide, demographic changes have concentrated personnel managers' minds on the need to attract new employees to the workforce as well as retaining existing empoyees. With 80 per cent of the workforce in the year 2000 already in work, training and personal development for employees is a critical employment issue. Ethnic minority recruitment, women returners and the promotion of existing workers are becoming a reality for the workforce. Many within these groups will require basic skills training in order to gain back confidence and competence.

Local authorities frequently have an equal opportunities policy, which can be invoked usefully to remind employers of their duties, and the advantages to them, of implementing good recruitment, retention and training strategies.

The Bloomsbury District Health Authority Workbase Project is an example of provision which arises from a furthering of Equal Opportunities in which the training needs of over 4000 ancillary workers have been analysed. Five 100 to 150 hour courses have

taken place, involving staff from seven different hospitals. Shorter courses of up to five days are ongoing and include low grade clerical staff.

Laurence Benson, the Equal Opportunities Adviser, promotes and supports workplace provision because *"there are very few black and ethnic minority managers in post . . ."* He hopes that basic skills training will enable staff to progress up from the ranks.

New Technology

New technology has meant changes in all workplaces (e.g. computers for stock control) which need trained and motivated staff to operate effectively.

Many health authorities want basic skills training to ease the introduction of new technology, e.g. cook-chill procedures at the North Middlesex Hospital. There was a great need for basic communications courses (80% of staff had basic skills difficulties) alongside considerable staffing problems and constraints, such as staff attraction and retention. Some staff had felt such anxiety at proposed changes that they contemplated leaving the service, despite having worked for the authority for 18-25 years.

Courses in the Middlesex Hospital included filling in food regeneration forms (24 hour clock, writing, sequencing), work forms (accident reports, time sheets), oral work on customer care/assertion, memos and message taking using pro formas. This was the result noted by their supervisor:

> *"I was dubious frankly, at the start, it looked cosmetic to me, with all the difficult changes here for staff, who should have had training years ago, but I gave it a go, and it's done wonders for everyone, I have compliments from all over. A & B were sorting out the rest of the belt the other day on the portion control, working it out for themselves. Y prevented an embarrassing mix up in refreshments ordered for a meeting, and X is a changed man he is so cheerful, he seems to be getting over his bereavement at last, and doing his own forms for the first time.*

Introducing Change

A northern company producing heaters had instituted huge changes in a hurry: team briefings, and quality circles as part of quality control. These were not greeted with open arms by the operatives who, despite good pay and profit sharing, still felt the changes were being imposed on them and were a trick to get more work out of them. As an element in a long term productivity strategy training is seen to represent excellent value for money. Workbase was received very positively and now staff are not only not resisting work training but demanding it: *"If wider training were given there would be more flexibility"*, said one operative. (See Case Study A for more detail).

European Single Market 1992

The European single market has several implications for basic skills training, for example in legal compliance with EEC pesticides regulations. A private firm, Thamesmead Town Ltd, found the pesticides course a waste of money, as so few staff had the literacy or numeracy skills required to understand the course work, never mind pass the test involving complex calibrations and metrics.

By the end of the pilot courses students had become more confident about writing independently. Those on the specialist maths course now felt they would approach the pesticides training with more real confidence of success. *"I could do it in my head, I never knew I could get it down on paper"* was the comment of one man who'd had to support his family as a market trader and had missed schooling as a result. *"Now I don't have to ask my girl to fill in my forms for me."*

Case Study A · **Training to meet the Deman**

WORKPLACE ISSUE

The Client:

A Heating Company in the North West, employing about 700 manual staff in assembly work, engineering and store-keeping.

The issues:

The company had recently introduced new working practices to implement a continuous improvement programme. All staff were expected to attend team briefings and become responsible for their own quality control. Managers were disappointed as few workers participated fully or contributed their expertise to meetings.

The Process:

a. The Steering Group

The joint Shop Stewards Committee recommended getting the company to agree to a joint management/union initiative. A steering group was set up and agreed aims and objectives for a training analysis.

b. Presentations (briefing meetings)

Workbase aims to ensure that all staff are given full information about Workbase. A systematic random sample of 150 staff was taken from the manual workforce. Briefings were held with line managers.

c. Interviews

Confidential interviews revealed that staff felt threatened. Team briefings worried them. They were expected to rotate chairing, minuting and report-back duties: "The job is changing and we have to talk much more, that worries me" . . . "I search for the right words to use, but it's hopeless" were typical comments.

d. Training Needs Analysis

Staff needed to be able to take part in team briefings, contribute ideas and become generally more confident in taking responsibility. Staff had become deskilled, in engineering in particular, and feared metrics.

e. Course

The pilot went ahead, and students contributed to a "Baxi News" article about Workbase.

"We the students, hope that after the initial involvement, the Company, via the unions and management will set up a permanent learning facility within Baxi for all Partners to take advantage of. We think this is a great opportunity for us to have a chance to brush up on our English and update our knowledge on the metric system. We would all like to take this opportunity to show our appreciation, to the company and the unions, Runshaw College, and the tutors, for putting this course on."

ds of New Working Practices

WORKBASE ACTION:

A Union Officer approached Workbase, who agreed that training might allay fears and improve workplace communications.

The Education Committee of the joint Shop Stewards' Committee in the company were asked to consider Workbase training options. There were several unions involved and liaison was crucial.

A Steering Group to monitor and evaluate was set up including reps from Personnel, the Trade Unions, Runshaw College education providers and production managers.

Workbase made three presentations on each site, of 10 to 20 people, without managers being present. It was random, so no-one would feel stigmatised.

All were offered an interview. The interviewers' aims were:

1. To look at communication skills needed in all the jobs.
2. Identify staff communication needs in relation to their jobs.
3. Recommend type of training which would meet those needs.
4. Note any other training wanted.

Report recommended

1. A communication skills course.
2. General maths and metrics courses.
3. Looking at ways of retraining skilled staff who were "rusty".

It was presented at a Steering Group meeting, and agreement reached over setting up a pilot communications, and a pilot maths course.

A Runshaw College tutor was given training in Workbase methodology and evaluation.

Tutors asked students to evaluate the course. One said: "We never had a chance before to tackle these problems, we used to hide them."... and "Now I've had a chance I could go much further. I can see the point in having the quality control meetings, now I have the confidence to speak." And on the workplace aspect another commented: "I would never have gone to a class at the college ever, now I want others to have the same chance I did."

The company was asked to evaluate the courses.

The evaluation was positive and ongoing training, possibly incorporating Open Learning methodologies, is planned.

Workbase has carried out an Open Learning on-site feasibility study and serious consideration is being given to this proposal.

Forms were sent to personnel, line managers and union representatives. Personnel interviewed students.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Employers have asked Workbase to improve the basic skills of some employees to enable them to win contracts. This applies particularly to Direct Works employees who under new contracts would be expected to undertake a greater variety of tasks, and be more flexible with no previous training. One gardener on such a course said: *"I haven't done any proper writing for years, was almost frightened to start, but it's surprising how you get into it with a bit of practice."* Such training can have the added effect of improving morale. Beverley James, a domestic finishing a Workbase course at University College Hospital, had not received any training in 20 years. She said: *"I like studying, I would like to learn something else, especially if our jobs are given to a private firm."* Now she attends a Local Authority Institute's evening classes.

Practitioners need to be able to use these arguments in order to convince employers that basic skills training is an investment not a cost.

6. Cost and Benefits of Training

As an organisation Workbase has consistently proved the need within industry for basic skills training. However it is still extremely difficult to persuade employers of the need for and benefits of basic skills training. Even when they recognise the need, they still resist paying out to remedy it.

One Managing Director said, after a long period of negotiation, when a need for basic skills training had been identified: *"Why are we paying for these people to read and write when they don't need to? You're not having a budget for this!"*

Employers do not have allocated budgets for basic skills workplace training. The need for communication skills must be first demonstrated, starting with a pilot project which fits in with operational requirements.

Providing education at the workplace is complex. Employers need to be convinced of the benefits of training and education and the value for money. Even release time for attendance is costly. One company estimated that each 100-hour course for 12 people cost it more than £9,000 in lost production alone, with tutor and consultancy fees adding about another £3,000. However, the Personnel Manager said: *"We wouldn't hesitate to take operators away from the shopfloor and teach them to operate new machines. What we are doing now has no quantifiable benefit, but we believe that confidence in communication skills is what we have to be about."*

His enthusiam represents a new mood among commercial companies. In the past, they rarely offered basic skills training to manual workers. If employees could not read or write adequately they would be more likely to get the sack than training in company time.

Management are usually surprised that so many staff:

(a) express an interest in training (often 90% want some sort of training) and

(b) the identified need for basic skills training should be so extensive.

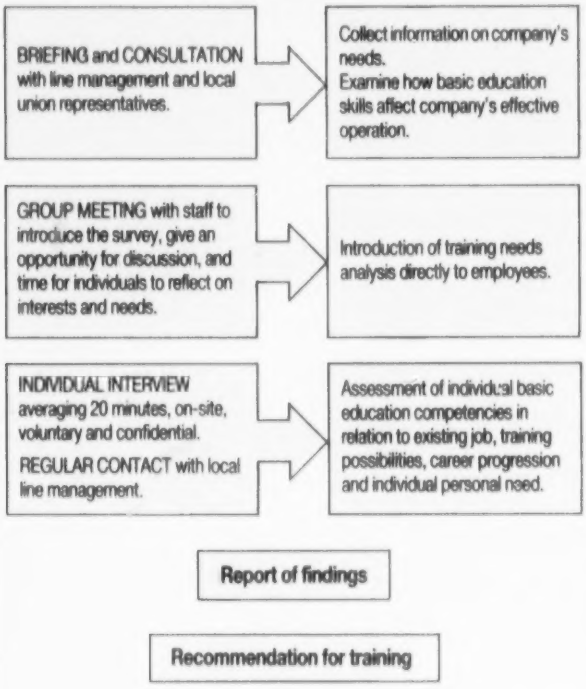
Workbase Methodology

Staff release is the area of greatest strain on a day to day basis, and excellent management relations between Workbase and line managers is crucial, and has to closely involve local providers/ tutors.

The stages of a training needs analysis are illustrated by the Case Studies, the chart on page 4 provides a summary.

The process is crucial. Workplace cultural change and job satisfaction is possible when workers are together shaping the direction of the organization into an effective, dynamic one, and therefore tutors and educationalists in this field have a key role to play in aiding those individuals to feel more confident in achieving this.

Stages of the Training Needs Analysis


BRIEFING and CONSULTATION with line management and local union representatives.
Collect information on company's needs.
Examine how basic education skills affect company's effective operation.
GROUP MEETING with staff to introduce the survey, give an opportunity for discussion, and time for individuals to reflect on interests and needs.
Introduction of training needs analysis directly to employees.
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW averaging 20 minutes, on-site, voluntary and confidential.
REGULAR CONTACT with local line management.
Assessment of individual basic education competencies in relation to existing job, training possibilities, career progression and individual personal need.
Report of findings
Recommendation for training
Courses
Held on-site, customised to meet specific needs of individual participants. Maximum group size is 10. Length between 50-100 hours over 3-6 month period.
On going evaluation and assessment.

Course Outcomes

Outcomes are usually of benefit both to students and to the company as a whole, as at Baxi heating where management and workers were brought together in a fruitful debate on the benefits of quality circles.

Employers are increasingly recognising the part training can play in developing new strategies of management. When a company has already trimmed its workforce to the minimum, the only way forward is to develop better working practices through greater worker involvement. Training becomes a means of both creating and retaining skilled workers. Expenditure on skills development may therefore be viewed not as a cost to be minimised, but as an investment to be assessed in the same way as other investments.

Ealing school cleaners had two parallel courses, one of Asian women who needed a great deal of support, many of whom were illiterate in their mother tongue, and a group who were not entirely, though mostly of Asian women, some of whom were well qualified. They all became much more positively engaged with the workplace as a result of the course, acting up, speaking in meetings, making positive suggestions about safety and getting rules changed on working alone late in the building as a result. One cleaner spoke for many colleagues when she said: *"Now I'm going to act up as supervisor next time I'm asked, then I can apply for promotion, now I know how to say what I mean better."*

Baxi Heating agreed to test the take up for basic skills courses and balloted staff. One said, *"I walked around with the form for three days and eventually plucked up courage . . . admitting you need help with reading and writing is like admitting you're an alcoholic . . . but now others are coming up to me and saying they wish they had applied."*

These three students from different courses said they had respectively improved their written and maths skills, oral communication, and confidence in academic ability and capacity to go on to vocational training.

Malcolm Richards from Heathrow Airport Ltd, said: *"The training provided on this course has given me greater confidence in my written communication and I hope all staff who have a similar need to improve their written and numerical skills will in due course go on this type of training."*

Eirwen Lewis, who has worked as a catering assistant at Bryntirion Hospital for four years was surprised; *"At first I was disappointed. I thought we would sit down and do English and Maths, and not so much talking! But now I see how important it is to be able to communicate."*

Duncan at Baxi Heating is now considering GCSE. He now keeps a diary and takes minutes at union meetings, and hopes one day to apply for management posts. He said: *"I believe learning to write has changed my life. People should be able to realise their full potential at work. A more educated shop floor is what's needed."*

Involving Line Managers

Line managers and supervisors also need to be completely aware of the benefits and implications of workbased training for their staff. They will have to cope with the immediate management headaches of sorting out cover arrangements, release, rotas and schedules, reshuffling, as well as dealing with a staff member who may have changed in some way, as a result of training.

In general, supervisors know they will benefit having more independent, literate and numerate staff. *"I can fill in my own time sheets now"* from some of the neediest, is an achievement which saves managers' time, as is: *"I can take phone messages now, and they make sense!"*, bringing efficiency, and better customer relations, as well as improved job satisfaction.

Employers want some control over, or knowledge of content, as they have to work to performance indicators, and meet high targets of productivity. Lead bodies are working to help industries assess competencies in all work areas, and we can all assist in this process by ensuring that workplace students have the opportunity to add Wordpower competencies in all work areas, to their portfolio of achievements.

In practice involving managers in courses seems to work well. Using them as a resource, source of information and further training can only help to empower students and is good PR for workplace communication skills training.

Students on workplace courses are encouraged to continue learning in local provision. Wider training opportunities within the workplace are also encouraged.

The training officer, or personnel manager should visit the course and outline such opportunities to students.

Courses: Materials and Design

Materials are important. ABE projects are centres of excellence in this field. The Workbase Materials Packs (ALBSU, 1988) indicates some of the ways in which workplace forms can be adapted, and some of the issues which usually arise, but each tutor will want to develop a course in a unique way, and the importance of students taking responsibility for their own learning cannot be overstated. The place to start is with skills/work/home checklists and confidence awareness exercises: *"At first I was very embarrassed because of my age"* said one older student *"but I realise it is not what you think, it is how you want to improve yourself"*, and *". . . it's given me confidence to go to evening classes now."*

Courses are customed-designed for each client. Some are very short 1-5 day customer care, assertion training or report writing courses, like the tasters run by Grace Keat at Treliske Hospital in Cornwall. After the communication skills course students said, *"I feel more confident with my fellow workers and my bosses"* and another *"It's the first time I've had a chance to sit and talk to a group of people and I felt I'd coped quite well."*

Others are more thorough – of up to 150 hours in both literacy and numeracy, usually called "Communication Skills" – like the Heathrow Airport Ltd course which drew on the in-house journal, work forms, and health and safety literature for materials. Ford Motor Company (Enfield) asked Workbase to run specific maths courses of 50 hours for brush up and metrics in order to support workers who were having difficulty with the paperwork associated with Statistical Process Control.

Work related basic skills allows practitioners to reach many adults who have not had access to ABE provision in the past. It also gives us the chance to develop materials which are really relevant to our clients. It gives adults who are disadvantaged in terms of access to education and training real opportunities for personal development and/or promotion work. We should aim to develop provision so that by the end of the 1990s every workplace has basic skills training on site.

CASE STUDY B — The Challenge of Regrading and Workplace Change

WORKPLACE ISSUES:

The Client
The Social Services Department (Adults Residential Homes Section) of an Inner City Borough

The Issues
The Council knew that, despite a strong commitment to equal opportunities, progress through the system disadvantaged staff with basic skills needs. The Economic Policy Unit had recommended Workbase for manual worker training so staff would apply for, and benefit from job-related training.

Because of recommendations made in The Griffiths Report managers realised staff would need training to cope with the proposed regrading.

Staff would be expected to take on extra duties, take more responsibility, have less supervision and become more involved with residents, rather than acting as "minders".

Care Assistants, regraded to Residential Social Workers and given key worker status, felt pressured by additional duties including making initial assessments, taking temperatures and blood pressures, giving medication and making decisions in the absence of senior staff.

The Process
Meetings took place between Workbase, Adult Homes senior management and the Training Section of the Department.

These formed the core Steering Group to oversee the project, agree aims and make training happen.

(a) Presentations
Presentations were made firstly to managers of the four homes, and all those with staff supervisory status. There were enthusiastic, and clear as to how the homes would benefit.

- They would be more likely to retain their staff if they felt they were making progress through training.
- They might be more confident about applying for promotion through upgrading, and better prepared for the demands of training.
- Agency cooks were used, at great expense. If kitchen assistants could develop their basic skills enough to take the 706 City & Guilds qualification it would improve the Homes' stability and service.

(b) Secondly, presentations were made to staff in Adult Residential Homes. The Union Representative introduced Workbase to the staff and described the project.

(c) Interviews
Excellent communication skills are essential for the job – including response to client's needs, their families, other professionals – in a nurturing and understanding manner. The questionnaires included checklists taking this into account as well as written skills.

WORKBASE ACTION:

Workbase helped set the agenda for the next stage.

Times were set for group presentation to staff in individual Homes.

Managers were asked to organise timetabling of individual interviews to accomplish it intensively.

Developing a Training Plan
A Training Plan would have to be done in this context and balance personal and corporate needs.

The main aims were to identify

1. The communication skills needs of the job.
2. Staff communication skills needs.
3. Recommend training to meet these needs, and other training needs found necessary.
4. Canvass staff views on the Council's training facilities and policy.

Workbase sought agreement to make presentations about training to all staff in four homes for the elderly, and for the training needs of 100 staff (the total non-managerial staff), to be discovered by individual confidential interview.

The tutor described what a typical course might provide for staff, and urged all to take part in the survey, to assess their training needs, at whatever level, from written to spoken English or brush-up maths to a Social Work Certificate course.

100 care assistants, domestic assistants, cooks, kitchen assistants, laundry persons and handy persons in four homes received 20-35 minute interviews. A common response was: "I've been too frightened to go on training before in case someone finds out I can't write" or "I've worked here for 14 years and never had any training."

(d) Training Needs Analysis and Report

All the interview findings were scrutinised and collated, forming the basis of the report. *Women returners* emerged as a considerable group, some of whom now wanted to brush up their original skills in clerical work and whom the Borough could redeploy if it retrained them.

The analysis grouped staff according to need and types of training they identified for themselves, whether in-service, or through day release e.g. City & Guilds Cookery 706 plus Job Change courses and "Updating Clerical Skills/ Wordprocessing".

It included a draft course content/outline section.

Reports were sent to all homes and manager.

The Senior Manager called a Steering Group meeting to discuss the Report findings and further action.

The Report was presented.

(e) Courses

It was agreed to set up two pilot courses running consecutively, two days a week for 12 weeks.

Managers said they wanted to make an input to courses as speakers, on key issues like: Equal Opportunities, Applying for Promotion, Health & Safety in Homes.

Students included two speakers of other languages, one who had never previously received schooling whose aim was "to fill in my own time sheet" and who achieved it, and several domestic assistants.

(f) Evaluation

It was agreed as important by all concerned, and the Department agreed to evaluate using Workbase pro formas. We have not been told all of the results yet, but a rolling programme of courses is underway, four other homes are now involved and current students include two who are deaf, one recent Vietnamese immigrant, who does not speak English (highly educated in the mother tongue), and three with nil or minimal schooling.

90% were interested in Workbase. The other 10% were well qualified, most had degrees.

Basic skills needs included:

Telephoning; Message taking; Report writing; Using Cardex systems; Taking temperatures; Handling Residents' money – shopping; Counselling approaches; Understanding ageing and health matters; Metrics in kitchens and the Home; Timetables; Making action plans for Residents; Promoting and awareness of equal opportunities.

The Steering Group approved it. The tutor agreed to develop materials and a scheme of work according to the Outline.

Workbase agreed, pleased to have such an actively enthusiastic response from very busy Officers in Charge.

Tutors prepared materials suitable for different levels within the group, used workplace proformas and literature, and varied approaches and methods. Later on students were encouraged to apply for further training within the department. Several have done so.

Informal student evaluations stated:

"I feel so happy to have met colleagues from other homes."

"I almost didn't come. I was surprised how much I enjoyed it. I hated school."

"I never thought I'd be able to use a calculator."

"I don't want to stop. I want to go on, and never stop learning."

(This student is changing her job within the council, which she wanted to do for a long time.) Several said, with a typical altruism, "others should have the chance."

Workbase Course 2 at Heathrow Airport Limited (1989)

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Understand and interpret relevant HAL literature

Completion of relevant forms, e.g. application for leave, accident and incident forms. Comprehension of staff instructions, e.g. sickness absence, staff directives, new regulations. Use of HAL publications, e.g. BAA News, company business, government directives. Apply different reading techniques, e.g. skimming and scanning.

B. Complete reports correctly

Understanding readership and language. Differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information. Completing incident report.

C. Understanding specific spelling techniques to improve confidence in writing

Applying these techniques when writing, e.g. Mnemonics, syllable breaking. Use of a dictionary. Recognition and use of spelling patterns within own and other writing. Proof read own and other work for errors and discrepancies.

D. Understand sentence construction

Recognising the basic grammatical features that make up a sentence and application in writing. Proof reading own and other work for errors and discrepancies.

E. Monitor their own needs and performance

Regular profiling of progress. Establishing future study needs.

F. Oral Communication

Listening and Understanding

Repeating oral messages and interpreting in own words. Resequencing statements in correct order. Acting upon information orally received. Understanding idiomatic expressions.

Speaking with confidence in English

Questioning and answering using accepted phraseology. Speaking clearly. Participating in role play involving both colleague and passenger situations.

To cater for individual student needs some flexibility is built into the overall twelve week programme.

The programme at Heathrow Airport Limited is a joint Workbase/ Hillingdon Adult Education Service initiative.